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AUTHOR	Risinger, C. Frederick; Lazarus, Stuart
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ABSTRACT

An emerging secondary school curriculum focus is on the study of the people and places closest to students themselves--their own families and the communities in which they live. These studies are popular because they start with the lives of students; help define students' self-concepts; focus student attention on areas for effective social action; promote the skills basic to becoming an effective family member, parent, and community member; and provide students with the least expensive and most extensive "media kit" available to them for an educational purpose. One approach to family education is to integrate elements into existing courses, the other is to probe more deeply than is possible in an integrated context into the skills, processes, and attitudinal requirements for a satisfying family life. Two features of community study merit notice: a close, naming-names-type of analysis of the community that leads to student-generated proposals for community betterment and the use of the community as a teaching/learning resource through carefully structured student internships and other community service opportunities. Examples of active programs are given and a brief annotated bibliography is included. (Author/IRT)

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Research
Ideas
Practice

CURRICULUM Report

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A NEW LIFE FOR . . .
FAMILY AND COMMUNITY STUDIES

Relatives Become Relevant

- In Collinsville, Ill., high school students are "parenting"--that is, learning the skills required to be a more-than-adequate parent by working with pre-school children in a structured, yet informal setting.
- Parkrose, Oreg., high schoolers can elect to take a course that simulates engagement, wedding, and the crucial early years of married life.
- Middle and junior high school students in Gary, Ind., are studying the multi-ethnic origins of their neighborhoods by tracing their own family trees through parent interviews.
- Secondary school students in Rockville, Md., and in many other communities are learning about and participating in community activities by working in libraries, municipal offices, and public service agencies. In the classroom, they discuss specific community and regional issues and study alternative problem-solving approaches.

Only a few years ago, study options like these would have been highly unusual. Today, however, they are examples of an emerging secondary school curriculum focus: the study of the people and places closest to students themselves--their own families and the communities in which they live. In high schools where programs of this sort have been made available to youngsters, the reactions have been overwhelmingly favorable from both students and parents.

Many school people think of these topics--the study of home and community--as traditional parts of the elementary school curriculum. Why, then, this sudden upsurge of interest in these matters at the secondary level?

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And With Good Reason

Family and community studies are becoming increasingly popular in high schools. They combine some of the best ideas in social studies education with some of the most immediate needs and concerns of high school age young people. Here are five specific considerations that account for this trend:

- Family and community studies start with the lives of students. Social studies courses in the past were organized around significant events in political and economic history. Unfortunately, this approach often merely served to increase the gap between course content and the experiences of students. In our concern for covering significant events we frequently fail to tap the most meaningful sources of information for students--their families and their communities, which are literally within arm's reach. Even more important, these sources are closest in a psychological sense. Such handy and relevant resources should be utilized.

- The study of families and communities can help define students' self-concepts. Through the study of their own families and the communities in which they live, students have an opportunity to put their own lives in perspective.

- Family and community studies focus student attention on areas for effective social action. The curriculum reforms of the 1960s concentrated on national and global problems--racism, war, poverty, overpopulation, and so on. Although boys and girls through this approach commonly gained a great deal of new knowledge and often became committed to the promotion of social change, they soon discovered that they were largely impotent when it came to effecting such change.

  Young people of secondary school age can do very little to prevent wars, eliminate poverty, or stop racial injustice; they can do little to solve the world's problems. Their efforts to achieve even modest change can easily lead to frustration. But they can apply their problem-solving skills and knowledge by working on some of the problems they see or experience at home or in the social contexts in which they are regular participants.

- Family and community studies can promote the skills basic to becoming an effective family member, parent, and community member. After graduation from high school, all students will be members of some community--the one in which they have been living or the one to which their educational or occupational plans take them. And sooner or later most of them will become members of a new family. By concentrating attention on these normal developments--their demands, opportunities, hazards, and rewards--high school students can better prepare themselves for effective participation in home and community life.

  Frequently students appear to believe that competent parenting and influential and rewarding participation in community life come "free" with their high school diplomas. The high rate of family disaffection and of community unrest provide convincing evidence of the weakness of this assumption. Social studies courses and other school programs should level with young people about the demands which family and community life will place upon them.

- Family and community studies provide students with the least expensive and most extensive "media kit" available to them for any educational purpose. School systems spend thousands of dollars each year on audiovisual materials to add realism to instruction and to supplement textbook and other printed materials. This is a desirable and helpful expenditure of school funds, to be sure; but their families and communities provide students with a rich and free source of resource data.

It must be granted, of course, that family-and-town studies do suffer somewhat from the limitations of their virtues when viewed as "audiovisual materials": activities in these areas cannot be previewed in the sense that films and tapes can be, and so may be a bit chancy to use; an episode or problem seldom can be run through in 20 minutes or the duration of a class period, and so is not easily fitted into the schedule of a standard syllabus; and the possibility of creating personal or community antagonisms is real.

Such considerations, however, are normal to the out-of-school world. They should be considered when drawing on family and community life; they should not be allowed to become sources of a debilitating timidity on the part of teachers and other curriculum makers.

In The Past, Mostly Casual Relations

Customarily, it has been in the lower elementary school grades that most of the teaching about families and communities has taken place. In fact, most social studies curriculum materials used in these early grades contain large segments devoted to these topics. But by the end of the fourth grade they have been relegated to the "back burner," not to get any further significant attention until encountered by some students at the high school level.

In high schools, young people may be involved in some form of community studies through field trips to the local courthouse or visits to local office-holders, activities usually carried out in the context of a course in social problems or government. Unfortunately, though, little emphasis is placed on such activities--for both teachers and students they are viewed principally as breaks in classroom routine or as ways in which to impress parents, school boards, and administrators with the "relevance" of instruction. Seldom has there been any systematic, structured program of community studies.

Family studies are just as haphazard. In a course such as Social Problems, the text is likely to contain a chapter or two that focus focus briefly--and blandly--on family-related issues like dating and take an outmoded look at comparative marriage laws. Only a very few schools, until recently, have made any attempt to provide courses or units that analyze individual and group dynamics of family life. Some schools do offer "family life" courses, but these are elective, and most students consider them snap courses, worth more for credit than for content.

Today, signs of change in substance and in procedure can be seen in a growing number of secondary schools. Curriculum committees, textbook writers and publishers, classroom teachers, and administrators are joining hands to put together learning experiences that permit adolescents to study both families and communities in more sophisticated ways, and which give them "hands on" contact with many of the realities that will be inescapable aspects of their lives.

Now, Friends and Relatives Are Teaching Aids

High schools are taking one or both of two approaches to developing more meaningful, vital instruction in the field of family studies. The "or both" observation is important, for it need not be a case of either-or. Actually, in this instructional area as in others a school ought to make a variety of kinds and forms of learning opportunities available to meet the needs of students with differing personal interests and educational and career plans.

One approach is to integrate family-study elements into existing courses. The "existing courses" used are most often in the social studies curriculum, but other disciplines also hold promise. (Consider the possibilities in English literature, consumer education, environmental studies, and mathematics.)

It is important to recognize that creating such an interweaving should go beyond merely finding a few spots in the curriculum into which some study of families can be inserted. The study of the family or its individual members can illuminate and give richness and depth to the study of many other topics, just as those topics can provide perspective and interpretation to the examination of the family as a basic societal group, at least in contemporary America.

"Who Took the Family out of the Schools and How To Get It Back in?" an article by Stuart Lazarus (see page 7), lists numerous ways in which family-related investigations fit naturally into the several social studies. Here is a sampling of the leads he offers:

- In Israel, kibbutz children are raised apart from their parents, so there appear to be no families as we use the word. What impact on youngsters? On adults? What parallels in our society? (This is a sample of the many opportunities for utilizing first-hand reporting by adult members of the school community in the discussion of family and community conditions and issues.)

- The daily lives and responsibilities of adolescents in colonial and early American years can not only provide a meaningful view of that important period in our history, but can also be a backdrop for an interpretive discussion of "then and now" when one is, say, 16 years old and a high school junior.

- Looking carefully at the many "political" decisions a student's family makes in the course of a week can do much to help young people not only to understand and accept the politicking that is necessary for the existence of any group, but also to see how that process can be used for the benefit of a family group in particular.

The second approach uses "family life" courses--often with other titles and varying in length--which probe more deeply than is possible in an integrated context into the skills, processes, and attitudinal requirements for a satisfying family life.

Many school people and other persons are tempted to continue thinking of family-studies courses as no more than part of the offering in home economics and to be taken, for the most part, only by girls readying themselves for housewifery or careers as kindergarten teachers. The encouraging fact is, however, that many school systems and other curriculum-builders have started to create attractive and substantial curriculum designs that are taking the study of the family "out of the kitchen" and giving it a prominent spot in the "living room," so to speak, as the following examples show.

PARK ROSE HIGH SCHOOL, 11717 N.E. Shaver St., Portland, Oreg. 97220.
Contact: Edward A. West, principal.

One of the striking characteristics of this school's family living course, which is open to eleventh and twelfth graders, is the organizing of the young people taking it into sets of hypothetical marriage partners. An important objective of the program is to help students understand and get experience in the communication skills they will need as they eventually go about forming families of their own. Another substantial segment of the course deals with making the financial decisions and managing a budget in a family setting.

The first part of this three-part course also includes the selection of a marriage partner and the institution of marriage. This first section, then, serves as an introduction to and an overview of the course as a whole.

In part two, students are confronted with typical problems encountered in the first year of married life--selecting a job, finding living quarters, and planning a budget. The problems likely to surface about the fifth year of marriage are also discussed to show students that, as a marriage matures, new issues and concerns and sources of tension can be anticipated, and that they can be handled on a non-disruptive basis if the marriage partners are ready for them.

The final part of the course continues this developmental sequence by highlighting the tenth year of marriage, wherein young people consider various alternatives for the future of their married relationship. The course ends with a tenth anniversary celebration.

FAMILY LIFE CURRICULUM PROJECT, Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pa. 15213.
Contact: Anthony N. Penna, director, 223 Porter Hall, Carnegie-Mellon University.

This is one of the university-based programs working on the development of curriculum designs and materials for family-life courses. Penna will be glad to answer inquiries about the ideas and materials in this project.

EXPLORING CHILDHOOD AND EXPLORING HUMAN NATURE, Educational Development Center/SSP, 15 Mifflin Place, Cambridge, Mass. 02138.
Contact: Janet Hanley Whitla, director.

and

THE HUMAN SCIENCES PROGRAM, Biological Sciences Curriculum Study, Box 930, Boulder, Colo. 80302.
Contact: The BSCS office.

These programs are mentioned here because, while they are not "family-life" courses in a strict sense, the range of their concerns is consistent with the purposes of family life instruction. For some schools courses such as these provide the organized base to which selected family-related topics can be added. Furthermore, these courses have been built, for the most part, on a modular plan so that selected units can be used in other courses.

The human sciences curriculum is still in the trial stage, but is being used developmentally in a number of schools around the country. The names of the schools and other information about the program are in the April 1976 BSCS Newsletter. It is free on request.

In Our Town, and In Yours

Community studies are taking on an equally personal and action-oriented character. Two features of this revitalization merit notice here: (1) a close, naming-names-type of analysis of the community as it is leading to student-generated proposals for community betterment--proposals that are more than just classroom exercises; and (2) using the community as a teaching/learning resource through carefully structured student internships and other community-service opportunities.

One detail of this revitalization and of the expansion of family studies programs is the increasing use of oral history procedures and materials. This method of historical study involves more than just going out and talking with people if the results are to be dependable and usable. But experienced teacher-users of the procedure affirm that (a) becoming skilled in the procedure has numerous concommitant values for youngsters; (b) applying the procedure to obtain family and community data provides students with first-hand insights they might not otherwise obtain; and (c) the information gathered by one "generation" of students becomes a valuable addition to the school's "data bank."

eg THE THREE-DIMENSIONAL PROJECT, Sturbridge Public Schools, Sturbridge, Mass. 01566.
Contact: Christian Castendyk, Tantasqua Regional Senior High School, Sturbridge.

Supported by Title III funds and directed by Castendyk, a member of the high school social studies department, and Albert George, a sixth grade teacher, this project has developed a model for community study that has been used at both the elementary and secondary school levels. That model was built around the town of Wales, which was once a thriving mill town but now is predominantly a summer resort community. Wales is located near Sturbridge but is not a part of it. (More details about this project can be found in an article by Castendyk in item 12 in the references on page 8.)

This full-circle-type of community study has value not only with respect to a community as a whole, but also when applied to an identifiable portion of a city or region. There are, of course, many other approaches to community conditions and problems--ecological studies are a frequently-employed current example. But whatever approach is used, the instructional design must come to terms with the implication community studies often leave that "it's downhill all the way."

eg COMMUNITY INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE PROGRAM, Montgomery County, Md., Public Schools.
Contact: William Zachmeier, department of curriculum and instruction,
850 North Washington St., Rockville, Md. 20852.

Initiated in 1969, this program now includes young people in 10 high schools in the county. In each of these, about 35 young people--usually seniors--participate annually in this full-year course. They are assigned to various public agencies and numerous private, non-profit organizations in the metropolitan Washington area. Students average about 10 hours per week of service, though many contribute much more of their time.

In addition to getting field experience, participants meet in a regular classroom setting to study and discuss community and regional issues, and to share their internship experiences and problems. Participating students receive full academic credit toward the school's social studies requirements. (The grading is done on a "contract" basis, with the field coordinator, the teacher, and the student taking part in the evaluation process.)

A Few Additional References

✓ Concerning family studies:

1. Harold Christensen, ed., Handbook of Marriage and the Family. Chicago, Ill.: Rand McNally & Co., 1964. Despite its publication date, this volume remains a useful reference on the theory and practice basic to family studies. An extremely comprehensive work.

2. J. Ross Eshelman, The Family: An Introduction. Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon, 1974. Though most appropriate for college students, this is an excellent resource for teachers in search of guidance in teaching family studies at the high school level.

3. Family Coordinator, Vol. 25, No. 2 (April 1976). This periodical, a publication of the National Council on Family Relations, contains useful ideas for teaching about families in secondary schools. The issue referenced here is devoted entirely to the topic of parenting.

4. Stuart Lazarus, "Who Took the Family Out of the Schools?" News and Notes on the Social Sciences, Indiana University, Spring 1976. This is the article mentioned previously. It suggests a variety of ways in which materials about families, past and present, can be used to advantage in established social studies courses. (Information about the availability of News and Notes is appended to this list of references.)

5. Esther D. Schulz and Sally R. Williams, Family Life and Sex Education: Curriculum and Instruction. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969. This volume contains an abundance of content materials and ideas for family study programs in grades K through 12.

6. Selective Guide to Materials for Mental Health and Family Life Education. Northfield, Ill.: Perennial Education, 1973. This volume, compiled by the Mental Health Materials Center, is a thorough, annotated bibliography of books, films, and pamphlets on mental health and family life. References provide information on sources, costs, and recommended uses.

7. Marvin Sussman, ed., Sourcebook on Marriage and the Family. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963. The annotation on the first of the references in this series is equally applicable here.

✓ Concerning community studies:

8. Ralph Brown and William Tyrell, How To Use Local History. Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1966. This eight-page teaching aid focuses on community history, and contains several excellent suggestions for student projects and researches. It is especially recommended for middle school teachers and supervisors.

9. Bicentennial 76: A Handbook for Teachers, Curriculum Bulletin No. 5, New York City Board of Education, 1975. This handbook, which can be purchased for $5 from the N.Y.C. Board of Education at 110 Livingston St., has a community Bicentennial base, and is likely to be of special value to teachers in urban schools inasmuch as it focuses on the past, present, and future of urban communities. Utilization of the ideas this volume contains need not, of course, be limited to this Bicentennial period.

10. W. Ron Jones, Finding Community: A Guide to Community Research and Action. Palo Alto, Calif.: James E. Freel Co., 1971. This publication suggests methods for selecting and implementing community action and improvement programs. Although designed primarily for college courses, it will prove useful to middle and high school teachers.

11. Greg Rhodes, "What Happened to Showers Brothers?" News and Notes on the Social Sciences, Indiana University, Fall 1976. Rhodes, who has been a teacher in the Louisville, Ky., public school system, discusses the teaching of local history by taking off from a 1922 newspaper advertisement that calls Showers Brothers of Bloomington, Ind., America's largest furniture maker. Showers Brothers no longer exists. What are the explanations?

12. Social Education, November-December 1975. This issue of the journal of the National Council for the Social Studies contains several articles that suggest themes and tactics for initiating secondary school programs in community studies.

13. Ted Underwood, "Undergraduates as Historians: Writing Local History in a Seminar on Historical Research," The History Teacher, November 1973. Don't let the title of this article turn you off, because it describes steps to local research and writing that can easily be adapted to middle school and high school levels.

Editor's comment: News and Notes on the Social Sciences, to which reference has been made in this bibliography, is a publication of the office of the Coordinator for School Social Studies, Indiana University, and is edited by one of the authors of this CR. It is available without cost by addressing a request to the editor at 513 North Park Ave., Bloomington, Ind. 47401. However, in the case of out-of-state schools only one free subscription per school can be provided.

KUDOS.....This issue of the Curriculum Report was drafted cooperatively by two members of the faculty of the School of Education at Indiana University: C. FREDERICK RISINGER, coordinator for school social studies; and STUART LAZARUS, an assistant professor. Both are also staff members of I.U.'s Social Studies Development Center. For several years before going to Indiana University, Risinger was chairman of the social studies department at Lake Park High School in Roselle, Ill. Lazarus was a teacher in the Pittsburgh, Pa., public schools and was on the staff of the Social Studies Development Center at Carnegie-Mellon University.

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